

Message Text

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ACTION SS-25

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 /026 W

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P 212325Z MAY 75

FM AMEMBASSY SAN JOSE

TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 0264

S E C R E T SAN JOSE 2076

EXDIS

E.O. 11652: XGDS-1

TAGS: PINS, CS

SUBJECT: COSTA RICAN CONSTITUTIONAL CRISIS

REF: A. SAN JOSE 1948

B. SAN JOSE 2071

1. IN DISCUSSION WITH EMBASSY OFFICER TODAY, MAY 21, ABOUT CURRENT POLITICAL CRISIS BETWEEN GOCR AND PARTY LEADER PEPE FIGUERES, PLN SECRETARY GENERAL LUIS ALBERTO MONGE APPEARED TO BE WELL INFORMED AND, AS USUAL, WILLING TO SHARE HIS INSIGHTS WITH THE EMBASSY. THE FOLLOWING ARE PERTINENT EXTRACTS FROM THAT CONVERSATION.

2. LUIS ALBERTO SAID THAT PEPE HAD ABANDONED HIS EARLIER IDEA OF FORCING A GOLPE UPON ODUBER AND IMPOSING A REGIME BY DECREE. (SAN JOSE 1948) FIGUERES REPORTEDLY CAME AROUND TO THIS POSITION AFTER DISCUSSIONS WITH ODUBER, MONGE, AND OTHERS. LUIS ALBERTO SAID THAT STIMULATING FIGUERES TOWARD THE GOVERNMENT BY DECREE ROUTE HAD BEEN LUIS BURSTIN AND "EXCELSIOR" EDITOR AND STAUNCH FIGUERISTA ALBERTO CANAS.

3. FIGUERES IS NOW PERSUADED, ACCORDING TO MONGE, THAT A LEGALLY CONVOKED CONSTITUTIONAL CONVENTION (CONSTITUENTE) IS THE PREFERRED ROUTE AND THAT ODUBER IS AGREEABLE TO THIS. MONGE SAID ODUBER TOLD HIM AT LUNCH ON MAY 20 THAT THE PRESIDENT HAD TOLD FIGUERES THAT HE WOULD ONLY BE AGREEABLE TO CONVOKING A CONSTITUENTE IF 1) GUILLERMO VILLALOBOS OF U.N. AGREED

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TO THE IDEA AND WOULD VOTE HIS DEPUTIES FAVORABLY AND 2)

ASSURANCES COULD BE DEMONSTRATED THAT THE PLN COULD CONTROL THE CONSTITUENTE ONCE IT WAS ASSEMBLED. LUIS ALBERTO SAID THAT ODUBER SUBSEQUENTLY HAD TALKED TO VILLALOBOS AND FOUND HIM TO BE NOT IN AGREEMENT WITH THE CONSTITUENTE IDEA, BUT HAD INDICATED THAT HIS FRACTION WOULD HELP IN ANY CONSTITUTIONAL REFORMS THAT DANIEL WANTED TO INTRODUCE IN THE ASSEMBLY IN THE NORMAL WAY. MONGE WENT ON TO SAY, WITH REGARD TO THE SECOND POINT, THAT BOTH HE AND DANIEL WERE FRIGHTENED THAT THE COMPOSITION OF A CONSTITUENTE WOULD, IN ALL PROBABILITY, LEAVE THE PLN IN A MINORITY POSITION AND THUS SEVERELY PREJUDICE THE PARTY AND PROBABLY ODUBER'S PRESIDENCY AS WELL.

4. LUIS ALBERTO SAID THAT FRANCISCO MORALES, (MINISTER OF LABOR) WHO IS CLOSE TO BOTH FIGUERES AND MONGE, TOLD HIM THAT FIGUERES IS CURRENTLY UNDER THE IMPRESSION THAT ODUBER WILL GO ALONG WITH A CONSTITUENTE (WITHOUT ABOVE CAVEATS). MONGE SAID THAT HE AND ODUBER DISCUSSED THIS APPARENT BUT SERIOUS MISUNDERSTANDING, AND THAT HE (MONGE) HAS NOW ASKED MORALES TO GET BACK TO FIGUERES TO CLEAR THIS UP.

5. MONGE HAD SEVERAL OBSERVATIONS ON THE REACTION OF THE COSTA RICAN PUBLIC FORCES IN THE EVENT OF AN ATTEMPTED COUP BY FIGUERES. HE SAID THAT PROBABLY ONLY 20-25 PERCENT OF THE TWO GUARDIAS WERE LOYAL TO FIGUERES - THIS PERCENTAGE CONSISTING OF BOTH OFFICERS AND TROOPS. HOWEVER, HE NOTED, THIS MIGHT NOT BE A USEFUL GUIDE IF FIGUERES "DARED" TO ACT. HE SUGGESTED, AS A HYPOTHETICAL BUT PLAUSIBLE SCENARIO, THAT FIGUERES MIGHT APPEAR IN THE MIDDLE OF THE NIGHT AT ONE OF THE GUARDIA CIVIL COMPANIES AND THROUGH THIS PERSONAL APPEARANCE AND WITH THE HELP OF THOSE FEW LOYAL TO HIM, GALVANIZE THE ENTIRE COMPANY TO ACT ON HIS BEHALF. HE ADDED THAT IT WOULD NOT TAKE MANY MEN OR MANY ARMS TO CARRY OUT A SURPRISE COUP IF FIGUERES DECIDED TO RISK IT.

6. COMMENT: MONGE'S UNDERSTANDING OF FIGUERES' INTENTIONS SEEMS TO BE SOMEWHAT AT VARIANCE WITH WHAT FIGUERES TOLD THE AMBASSADOR ON MAY 20, AS REPORTED IN FIRST PARAGRAPH REF B. TEL. IT COULD BE, HOWEVER, THAT FIGUERES DOES, IN FACT, UNDERSTAND OR HAD BEEN INFORMED OF ODUBER'S RESERVATIONS ABOUT A CONVOCAION OF A CONSTITUENTE AND, FRUSTRATED BY

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ODUBER'S NON-ACCEPTANCE OF HIS CONSTITUTIONAL SOLUTION, HAS REVERTED TO A MODIFIED VERSION OF A GOLPE.

7. WITH REGARD TO MONGE'S COMMENT ON FIGUERES' CAPACITY TO SWING OVER A SMALL BUT SUFFICIENT PORTION OF THE GUARDIA THROUGH A PERSONAL APPROACH, THE EMBASSY BELIEVES IT IS WORTH NOTING THAT CHARPENTIER HAS, PERHAPS IN ANTICIPATION OF SUCH A THREAT, FORMED A 100 MAN ELITE GROUP OF UNQUESTIONED

LOYALTY WITHIN THE GUARDIA WHICH COULD BE USED FOR
SPECIAL PURPOSES.
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Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptioning: X
Capture Date: 01 JAN 1994
Channel Indicators: n/a
Current Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Concepts: POLITICAL SITUATION, CONSTITUTIONAL CONVENTION, DIPLOMATIC DISCUSSIONS, MEETING REPORTS
Control Number: n/a
Copy: SINGLE
Draft Date: 21 MAY 1975
Decaption Date: 01 JAN 1960
Decaption Note:
Disposition Action: RELEASED
Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Authority: GolinoFR
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Date: 28 MAY 2004
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
Document Number: 1975SANJO002076
Document Source: CORE
Document Unique ID: 00
Drafter: n/a
Enclosure: n/a
Executive Order: X1
Errors: N/A
Film Number: D750178-1037
From: SAN JOSE
Handling Restrictions: n/a
Image Path:
ISecure: 1
Legacy Key: link1975/newtext/t19750531/aaaabbsh.tel
Line Count: 118
Locator: TEXT ON-LINE, ON MICROFILM
Office: ACTION SS
Original Classification: SECRET
Original Handling Restrictions: n/a
Original Previous Classification: n/a
Original Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Page Count: 3
Previous Channel Indicators: n/a
Previous Classification: SECRET
Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Reference: 75 SAN JOSE 1948
Review Action: RELEASED, APPROVED
Review Authority: GolinoFR
Review Comment: n/a
Review Content Flags:
Review Date: 08 SEP 2003
Review Event:
Review Exemptions: n/a
Review History: RELEASED <08 SEP 2003 by CunninFX>; APPROVED <14 NOV 2003 by GolinoFR>
Review Markings:

Margaret P. Grafeld
Declassified/Released
US Department of State
EO Systematic Review
05 JUL 2006

Review Media Identifier:
Review Referrals: n/a
Review Release Date: n/a
Review Release Event: n/a
Review Transfer Date:
Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
Secure: OPEN
Status: NATIVE
Subject: COSTA RICAN CONSTITUTIONAL CRISIS
TAGS: PINS, CS, (FIGUERES, PEPE), (ALBERTO MONGE, LUIS)
To: STATE
Type: TE
Markings: Margaret P. Grafeld Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 05 JUL 2006